

# Easthampton, MA: Eastworks

The old millponds near the center of Easthampton have become a focal point for the physical and economic revitalization of its downtown. With a combination of private and public investment and vision, the city is rediscovering and reinventing its long-time economic engines – its mills and its waterfront resources.

Easthampton's downtown redevelopment efforts promote many of the Office for Commonwealth Development's *Sustainable Development Principles*<sup>1</sup>. The principles represented by Easthampton's revitalization efforts include:



- Redevelop first
- Concentrate development
- Restore and enhance the environment
- Expand housing opportunities
- Increase job opportunities

Like many riverside communities in Massachusetts, Easthampton had its share of empty, decaying mill buildings, in this case concentrated just off the downtown. The groundwork for the redevelopment of this area began with the creation of a mixed-use mill district and the designation of an Economic Opportunity Area. This designation, supported by the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Business and Technology, allows businesses seeking to locate or expand in the area to take advantage of special local and state tax and financing incentives. Actual redevelopment of the area began in earnest in late 1997 when the four-story 502,000 square foot mill building, once the headquarters for Stanley Home Products, began a new life as Eastworks.

The multi-use redevelopment of Eastworks has become a vibrant commercial, service and residential center for Easthampton, containing 75 businesses and 32 units of new housing. Each floor exhibits its own personality. The first floor contains public retail space, including a restaurant and art gallery; the second floor is home to a commercial darkroom and photography school along with a jeweler, candy distributor and collectibles dealer. The third floor contains office suites for a number of non-profit organizations and professional business, while the fourth floor contains 32 residential lofts geared toward artists looking for combined living and studio space. All told, this one re-use project has already generated 170 new or retained jobs and will ultimately provide housing for at least 46 households.

The public sector is also contributing to the revitalization of Eastworks and the neighboring areas. The Registry of Motor Vehicles has located a branch office in Eastworks, contributing to its vibrancy. To compliment the \$3.3 million they have already invested, the owners of Eastworks are seeking other resources for exterior improvements and additional assistance with commercial buildout that is anticipated to generate 36 additional full-time jobs. At the same time, the City of Easthampton continues to dedicate Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to activities in the adjacent downtown. This includes assistance to small businesses to make their establishments barrier-free, micro-enterprise job



development opportunities and an expansion of the local senior center.

The redevelopment of Eastworks was the first in a series of public and private actions to revitalize the center of Easthampton. Its success spurred additional efforts of revitalization and sustainable development throughout the city. In 2002, The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs sponsored an Urban River Visions charrette which brought together approximately 70 local leaders, activists and community residents to discuss the revitalization of an important environmental and cultural resource: the Lower

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.mass.gov/ocd/docs/SDPrinciples\\_color.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/ocd/docs/SDPrinciples_color.pdf)

Mill Pond. Their discussion focused both on the future of the many mill buildings that surround Lower Mill Pond, and on the natural resources in and around the pond itself. A major component of that vision, the Manhan River Rail Trail, has been realized.

Revitalization of other nearby mill buildings is also occurring. The owner of Clippership Distribution, a business that began as a hobby and grew in space rented in the Eastworks building, has revitalized a nearby 55,000 square foot mill that now houses not just his own business, but River Valley Woodworks as well. New England Fixtures moved into another mill whose owner is seeking to redevelop an additional 140,000 square feet for offices, studios and light manufacturing.